



FAISAL IBN ABDULAZIZ IBN SA'UD, SECOND SURVIVING SON OF IBN SA'UD.
From a portrait by Miss Janet Robertson in the possession of Mr. J. Conway Davies.

THE HEART OF ARABIA

A RECORD OF TRAVEL & EXPLORATION

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TO THE MEMORY OF

MY BROTHERS

MAJOR H. P. PHILBY, D.S.O.

COMMANDING 2ND BATT. YORK AND LANCASTER REGIMENT

AND

LIEUTENANT D. D. PHILBY

1ST BATT. ROYAL DUBLIN FUSILIERS, ATTACHED 2ND BATT.

ROYAL MUNSTER FUSILIERS

WHO FELL IN FLANDERS DURING THE GREAT WAR

I DEDICATE THIS WORK

PREFACE

OF the pleasant year I spent sojourning and wandering amid the deserts and oases of Arabia I have endeavoured to compile a record, at once fully descriptive of my own experiences and designed to serve my successors as a faithful guide in their wanderings, when in their turn they take up the torch which has been held in the past by so many distinguished hands—Niebuhr and Burckhardt, Sadlier and Burton, Doughty and the Blunts, Wallin and Wellsted, Huber and Halévy, Euting and Guarmani, and, in modern times, Shakespear and Gertrude Bell, to name but a few of those whose names are writ large on the scroll of Arabian explorers.

It was with little fitness to undertake geographical or scientific work of any kind that I entered Arabia, but chance led me far afield from the tracks of those who had been in that country before me ; and natural curiosity, fortified by a sense of duty, impelled me to record day by day and almost hour by hour everything I saw or heard in the course of my wanderings in the hope that some day, the grain being separated from the chaff, there might remain a residue of useful matter worthy of presentation to the world. The few scientific instruments I carried with me, with a limited knowledge of their proper uses, have enabled the experts of the Royal Geographical Society to use the detailed itineraries of my journeys in the preparation of reasonable maps of a country hitherto in great part conventionally charted on the basis of second-hand information. To their unsparing efforts are due the two maps, which, with the Society's permission, I am able to publish with these volumes ; and it is but fitting that I should place

on record my gratitude both for their work and for the generous encouragement I have received from the Royal Geographical Society itself since my return from Arabia.

Circumstances have necessitated the limitation of these volumes to a record of the first part only of my sojourn in Arabia, ending with my return to the *Wahhabi* capital after an excursion in the summer of 1918 to the provinces of Southern Najd. Circumstances alone will determine whether the record of the latter part of my wanderings and of the *Wahhabi* campaign against Hail in the autumn of the same year shall ever see the light of day. But for the moment I have deemed it better to set forth in full the details of a portion of my experiences than to deal more summarily with the whole period of my residence in Arabia. And, finally, circumstances alone—circumstances over which I have unfortunately no control—will decide whether I shall ever return to the deserts of Arabia to resume a task which, I am fully conscious, I have left unfinished.

A few words of explanation on the vexed subject of the transliteration of Arabic names. In view of the lack of uniformity among the various official and unofficial bodies, who have occasion in the course of their work to consider this problem, the Royal Geographical Society has during the past year taken the lead and set to work to discover whether existing differences of practice can be reconciled by the adoption of any uniform system based on the elimination of all diacritical marks and accents. After much discussion of the subject by the assembled champions of all the systems in the field, a final decision has recently been arrived at in favour of a system based on and but little differing from that in general use by the General Staff of the Army in India. That system was used during the war in Mesopotamia for survey purposes; and there can be little doubt that the modification of it now accepted by the Royal Geographical Society represents as near an approach to the ideal as it is possible to arrive at in the circumstances.

Unfortunately that decision was arrived at after this work was completed in manuscript, and I have not thought it necessary to undertake the considerable labour which would be involved in making the requisite corrections,

albeit such corrections would only be required in respect of two points. The **ج** of the Arabic definite article should be assimilated under the new system to the first letter of the following word in all cases, in which such assimilation takes place in the pronunciation of the Arabic, while I have transliterated it by its literal equivalent—**L**—in all cases;¹ and I have adopted **-IYYA** as the transliteration of the common termination **ـة**, while the new system prescribes the simpler **-IYA**.

With these two exceptions the system I had already adopted conforms with that now recommended by the Royal Geographical Society, which, needless to say, I shall adopt in future. But in the text of this work I have here and there deliberately adopted the vernacular pronunciation as the basis of my transliteration, with the sole object of indicating the character of such pronunciation; and furthermore, I have marked all long vowels *in the index only* for the information of those who are sufficiently curious to refer to it. The place-names on the map of Southern Najd have been transliterated in accordance with the system formerly accepted by the Royal Geographical Society and now discarded, but, the map having already been published, it has been found impossible to bring it into line with the new system.

I am much indebted for many suggestions for the improvement of these volumes to the Hon. Sir Percy Z. Cox, G.C.I.E., K.C.S.I., K.C.M.G., H.B.M.'s High Commissioner for Mesopotamia, and Miss Gertrude L. Bell, C.B.E., who have been kind enough to read them through in proof; and my especial thanks are due to my publishers for their unflinching patience and indulgence.

BAGHDAD, December 1920.

¹ In Central Arabia assimilation of the **ج** is often dispensed with.

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INTRODUCTION

“ DEPUIS quelques années il s'est élevé dans la province d'*el Ared* une nouvelle secte ou plutôt une nouvelle religion, laquelle causera peut-être avec le temps des changemens considérables et dans la croyance et dans le gouvernement des Arabes.”¹ So wrote Carsten Niebuhr, the father of Arabian exploration, in his record of an expedition to Arabia undertaken at the instance of the Danish Government about the middle of the eighteenth century.

The information collected by him from prejudiced sources at a considerable distance from the scene of the events which he briefly recorded was far from being as full as we might desire ; but to him belongs the credit of having been the first to bring to Europe news of the first beginnings of a movement, which not only justified his prediction of its import within half-a-century of its utterance, but has persisted through all vicissitudes of fortune with little change of form or substance to our own days, and may yet under the changed conditions of the modern world attain the goal marked out for it by its originators.

In those days Desert Arabia, inhabited by nomad tribes eking out a precarious existence under conditions differing little if at all from those obtaining in patriarchal times, was, politically speaking, parcelled out into a number of independent principalities, some of which at any rate owned a vague allegiance to 'Arair, the principal Bani Khalid *Shaikh* of the Hasa province. Strife reigned supreme until the birth of the “ new religion,” and since then peace and war have alternated in Arabia according as that religion was in the ascendant or in abeyance.

¹ Niebuhr, *Voyage en Arabie*, 1774, vol. iii. p. 298.

“ Quelques-uns des *Schechs* indépendans nouveaux-convertis,”¹ wrote Niebuhr, “ qui se faisaient auparavant une guerre continuelle, devinrent amis par l’entremise d’*Abd ul wâhheb* et s’accordèrent à ne rien entreprendre d’important sans avoir auparavant consulté leur nouvel Apôtre. Par-là la balance politique fut détruite entre les petits Princes d’*El Ared*, parce que plusieurs *Schechs*, qui pouvaient auparavant tenir tête à leurs voisins, ne furent plus en état de se soutenir contre tant de *Schechs* réunis ; et les guerres devenaient toujours plus meurtrières et plus vives, en ce que les peuples des deux côtés s’imaginaient, qu’on ne les poursuivait que pour la cause de leur religion, et qu’ils étaient obligés d’user de force contre les hérétiques obstinés, ou les incrédules qui persévéraient dans leurs anciennes erreurs.” It would be impossible to summarise more concisely the character and methods of a militant policy whose goal was peace. The chosen instrument of that policy was a petty baron of the noble clan of ‘Anaza, who held his court after the *Badawin* fashion in a castle built by his ancestors on the rock of Dara’iyya amid the torrent strands of Wadi Hanifa. Like his contemporary in the Scottish Highlands, Rob Roy of Clan MacGregor, whose struggles with the Dukes of Argyll and Montrose on either side of him were but the death throes of the tribal system in our own islands, Muhammad the third or fourth chieftain in the direct line of descent from Sa’ud I., the eponymous ancestor of the dynasty of Ibn Sa’ud, found himself in the middle of the eighteenth century surrounded by powerful and ambitious neighbours, of whom the most formidable were the principalities of ‘Ayaina and Manfuha, ever contending with each other over the ruins created by their perpetual warfare for supremacy in Central Arabia.

But the prince of ‘Ayaina was blind to his opportunity when it came, and it was to the court of Dara’iyya, where the ‘Anaza tradition of lavish hospitality filled the halls of Muhammad with *Badawin* guests, that there came about the year 1759 a prophet who had found no honour in his own country. Born of Tamimi parents at Huraimala in the district of Mahmal about the third decade of the eighteenth

¹ Niebuhr, *Voyage en Arabie*, vol. iii. p. 299.

century, Muhammad ibn 'Abdulwahhab had spent his youth studying at the Universities of Baghdad and Damascus, and now returned with a message calculated to electrify his fellow-citizens of 'Ayaina, but was driven forth from that city as one likely to disturb the peace of a court content with its own ways.

But the baron of Dara'iyya and after him his successor Sa'ud II. hailed the seer as a proper instrument for the furtherance of their secular ambitions, and the *Wahhabi* creed came into being as the result of their earnest collaboration. For all their backsliding from the true faith of *Islam* the Arabs were still at heart staunch to the principles of the puritan school of Ahmad ibn Hanbal, and it required but little effort to stir the embers of fanaticism ever latent among the desert folk of Arabia. The true faith was purged of the dross of ecclesiastical pedantry, and the salient facts of a moribund creed were made to shine forth again as beacons to every wanderer in the wilderness of doubt. The unity and jealousy of God, the vital necessity of belief and the certainty of reward to all believers—these¹ were the cornerstones of the edifice, which prince and priest set to work to erect upon the shifting sands of nomad society; and the edifice that grew out of those foundations was an Arabian Empire.

Before Sa'ud II. and Muhammad, the priest, were gathered to their fathers at the end of the eighteenth century their dreams had been realised. 'Ayaina and Manfuha had fallen before the onslaught of their inspired armies, the Hasa had succumbed to them, lesser states had vanished from the scene and the Ottoman Empire itself had been rudely awakened to a sense of impending danger.

'Abdul'aziz II., the son and successor of Sa'ud, followed in the footsteps of his father with such success that the *Shia'* shrine of Karbala, on the borders of Mesopotamia, experienced the terrors of a *Wahhabi* incursion in 1801, and two years later Mecca itself was annexed to the growing empire. But the desecration of Karbala was a crime for

¹ The principles of the *Wahhabi* creed were embodied by its founder in a pamphlet entitled "The Three Principles and the Proofs Thereof," which Ibn Sa'ud has recently (1918) had reprinted at Bombay in connection with the *Ikhwan* movement.

which there could be no pardon, and the year that had witnessed his triumphal entry into Mecca saw 'Abdul'aziz bow down before his God in the great mosque of Dara'iyya for the last time—with an assassin's dagger between his shoulder-blades.

His son and successor, 'Abdullah, having completed his father's last campaign by the capture of Madina in 1804, turned his attention without delay to provinces farther afield, and made himself master of 'Uman and the Yaman before he had been long on the throne; but the apprehensions of Turkey had now been fairly aroused, and in 1805 Muhammad 'Ali Pasha became Viceroy of Egypt, with instructions to bring the *Wahhabi* Emperor to his knees. In 1810 the campaign, for which elaborate preparations had been made, was launched under the command of his son, Tussun, who, in 1812, suffered a signal defeat in the mountain passes between the Red Sea coast and Madina, but later in the same year recovered the latter town without much difficulty. Simultaneously success attended the Turkish cause in the south, and Jidda, Mecca and Taïf were occupied in rapid succession; but in the winter of 1813–14 Tussun was defeated at Turaba, and Burkhardt, who visited the Hijaz in the following summer and has left us an admirable summary of the events of this period, records that despondency was rife in the Turkish army owing to a variety of causes arising out of the rapacity and incapacity of the higher command.

The *Wahhabis* meanwhile carried on a guerrilla warfare with great success against the scattered forces of the enemy, and it was not until the spring of 1815 that the tide turned once more in favour of the Turks, whose victory at Busal, between Taïf and Turaba, put an end to 'Abdullah's influence in the south, while Tussun actually reached the Qasim on a flying raid into the interior from Madina and forced the *Wahhabi* monarch to agree to a truce, whose terms were certainly favourable to the Turks.

'Abdullah seems at this stage to have lost much of the ardour which had inspired his ancestors and his own earlier operations, and the initiative now passed definitely to Muhammad 'Ali, who, having spent two years in active preparations for the resumption of hostilities, sent another

son, Ibrahim Pasha, in 1818, in charge of an expedition destined to achieve the end for which he had worked for thirteen years.

Dara'iyya was besieged by the Turkish army, whose artillery reduced the inhabitants to such straits that 'Abdullah was compelled to capitulate on a Turkish guarantee that the lives and honour of his subjects would be respected. He himself and the more important members of the royal family were reserved to grace the triumph of his conqueror at Cairo ; the rest of the royal family, the *Wahhabi* priesthood and other leaders of the people were disposed of by the simple expedient of a general massacre ; and the walls and palaces, mosques and mansions of Dara'iyya were razed to the ground, where their ruins lie to this day, a monument of the great days of the *Wahhabi* Empire, of its rapid rise and headlong fall and of its victor, whose name and race are still execrated by the descendants of his victims after the lapse of a whole century.

For the next thirty years the Turks maintained a precarious foothold amid the wreckage of the Empire they had destroyed, and Arabia knew no peace. Ever and anon the Turkish Viceroys were challenged by some survivor of the *Wahhabi* dynasty, and the history of these years is little but a record of guerilla warfare between the Arabs and the Turks. Turki, the son of 'Abdullah, who had been absent from Dara'iyya at the time of the final tragedy, rallied the drooping spirits of his people about 1830 by the reoccupation of his father's throne and the creation of a new capital at Riyadh ; and ten years later 'Abdullah ibn Thunaian, a scion of a collateral branch of the Sa'ud family, reigned for a brief space over the *Wahhabi* territories ; but it was reserved for Faisal, the son of Turki, who had been carried off into exile with his grandfather, and who had escaped from his prison in Egypt, to reorganise the shattered fortunes of his country and to put an end to Turkish dominion therein.

After two failures he finally established himself on the throne of Riyadh about 1842, and by the time of his death, about a quarter of a century later, had restored something of the vigour which had characterised the *Wahhabi* state in its early days ; but by this time the rival state of Jabal Shammar

had risen into prominence under the skilful leadership of the founders of the Ibn Rashid dynasty, and Faisal was never strong enough to reassert the claim of his ancestors to suzerainty over Haïl. Be that as it may, we have the contemporary testimony of Palgrave and Pelly that, shrunk though it was from its original dimensions, the state that he bequeathed to his successors differed little, if at all, in essentials from that which his great-grandfather had inherited from the great Sa'ud and was well ordered in all respects but one.

Of the disastrous dispute over the succession which arose between his two eldest sons at his death, of the Rashidian occupation in which that dispute resulted during the 'eighties of last century and of the eventual recovery of the *Wahhabi* throne in 1901 by a cadet of the royal family, who still holds it to the great advantage of his subjects, I shall have occasion to give the details in the course of the ensuing narrative of my sojourn in the heart of Arabia during the last year of the Great War.

The dramatic revival of the *Wahhabi* power was, to say the least, somewhat disconcerting to Turkish policy, which had arrived at a satisfactory *modus vivendi* with Ibn Rashid ; and Turkish troops were sent to help the Shammar to stem the northward advance of Ibn Sa'ud in 1904. But the Qasim was recovered by the latter in 1906, and an invasion of that province by the troops of the Sharif of Mecca in 1910 did not materially check the re-establishment of *Wahhabi* authority throughout the territories which had acknowledged the rule of Faisal. There remained, however, little doubt in the mind of Ibn Sa'ud that the Turks were only awaiting a favourable opportunity to crush him as they had crushed his great-great-grandfather a century before, and it was but natural in the circumstances that he should seek about him for the means of averting the danger which threatened him.

It was to Great Britain that he looked—though for a time in vain. Dark clouds were already rising over the political horizon, and Turkey was rapidly becoming the cat's-paw of German ambitions. The Baghdad railway was slowly bringing the forces of Germany within striking distance of the

nerve-centre of the British Empire. Ibn Sa'ud, who had been brought up in exile at Kuwait, the ultimate destination of the German strategic railway, realised that his own security was involved in the coming struggle, and it was not without purpose that he encouraged the visits to his own territories and cultivated the friendship of the late Captain W. H. C. Shakespear, who was Political Agent at Kuwait during the fateful years which preceded the bursting of the storm.

None knew when that storm would burst upon the world ; but early in 1914 Ibn Sa'ud felt himself strong enough to strike a blow at Turkey on his own account. He descended suddenly upon the Hasa province, which the Turks had held since Midhat Pasha had annexed it in 1871 ; his victory was complete and the Turkish garrisons left his territories for good ; before they had time to organise an expedition to avenge their defeat they were swept by their own amazing folly into the vortex of the European War.

Sir Percy Cox, who accompanied the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force as Chief Political Officer, immediately sent Captain Shakespear to spur Ibn Sa'ud into active operations against the Turks and their natural ally, Ibn Rashid. The campaign was launched in January 1915, and I have always thought that, had it not been for the unfortunate accident of Shakespear's death in the very first battle between the rival forces, Colonel Lawrence might never have had the opportunity of initiating and carrying through the brilliant campaigns with which his name is associated, and as the result of which he entered Damascus in triumph at the head of the army of the Hijaz.

For a time our faith in the ability of the Arabs to co-operate with our forces in modern warfare was shaken, and, though the continuance of cordial relations between ourselves and Ibn Sa'ud was ensured by the ratification of a formal treaty in 1916, it was not to him that we looked for assistance when circumstances necessitated an effort on our part to secure the active co-operation of the Arabs in our operations against the Turks.

The Sharif of Mecca stepped into the breach from which Ibn Sa'ud had withdrawn, and the subsequent course of

events in the Arabian theatre of war is sufficiently well known to need no recapitulation. The initial successes of the Hijaz forces, however, encouraged the Mesopotamian authorities to hope for a corresponding effort on the part of Ibn Sa'ud, whose co-operation, if it could be secured on reasonable terms, might be of value in connection with the blockade operations then in progress on the Euphrates. It was hoped, moreover, that, in view of the growing tension between Ibn Sa'ud and King Husain, the energies of the former might be usefully diverted to an attack on Hail, where Ibn Rashid, with the fitful encouragement and assistance of the Turks, was always a potential thorn in our sides.

And so in due course it was decided that a British Mission should be sent to Riyadh to study the possibilities of the situation on the spot, and to the charge of that Mission, which left Baghdad in October 1917, I had the great good fortune to be appointed. With me, as military expert and representative of the Commander-in-Chief of the Mesopotamian Force, went Lieutenant-Colonel F. Cunliffe Owen, C.M.G., R.F.A., who was attended by his batman, Private H. Schofield, a young Yorkshireman of great charm and promise, while Lieutenant-Colonel R. E. A. Hamilton,¹ C.I.E., I.A., Political Agent at Kuwait, was to join us at Riyadh, whither he had already set out in connection with an incident arising out of our blockade operations.

Time was precious, and we could not wait for the fruition of plans then under consideration for the inclusion among our number of representatives of the High Commissioner for Egypt and the King of the Hijaz, as also of a medical officer and a wireless party. The first two were to join us at our destination by way of the Hijaz, but for reasons which will appear in the course of my narrative failed to keep their tryst; no medical officer was available at the time, and the idea of keeping the Mission in wireless touch with the world was also abandoned. Within a month, moreover, of our landing in Arabia the Mission, as such, ceased to exist, and the departure first of Colonel Hamilton and afterwards of Colonel Cunliffe Owen and Schofield left me the sole survivor of a company that might have

¹ Now Lord Belhaven and Stenton.

INTRODUCTION

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been imposing, and for the best part of a year the sole representative of Great Britain in the heart of Arabia—the bearer to the Arabs of Wahhabiland of that great message of goodwill, which went forth in the dark days of the war to assure a proud race long ground down under the heel of the Ottoman Turk of the freedom which awaited it when the storm should be gone. In calling upon the Arabs to play their part in operations designed to achieve their liberation from Turkish tyranny we specifically disclaimed for ourselves and our Allies any ulterior motive of material profit or imperial ambition. Two years have rolled by, bringing forgetfulness of the heartfelt relief with which we acclaimed the news of our hard-won victory; and the Arabs, long patient but growing restive, still await the redemption of our pledges. As one of the least of the mouthpieces used by His Majesty's Government for the conveyance of an assurance of their goodwill to the Arab peoples, I may express the hope, nay, the firm conviction that, whatever temptings there may have been or may yet be to a contrary policy, the word of Britain will not be broken in the East.